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# TWO SERMONS,

PREACHED AT

MILL-HILL CHAPEL, in LEEDS,

ON THE

CELEBRATION

OF THE

HUNDREDTH ANNIVERSARY,

OF THE

# HAPPY REVOLUTION.

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By WILLIAM WOOD. k

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BRITISH MUSEUM

# SERMON I.

## PSALM cii. 18—20.

*This ſhall be written for the generation to come: and the people who ſhall be created ſhall praiſe the Lord. For he hath looked down from the height of his ſanctuary: from heaven did the Lord behold the earth: to hear the groaning of the priſoner, to looſe thoſe that are appointed to death.*

IF the value of every thing is to be eſtimated by its uſe, what, my brethren, can claim ſo high a place in the ſcale of worth, as that which may be employed with advantage at all times, which is equally applicable to all ſubjects, and is always ſubſervient to the beſt purpoſes? This is the proper, the unrivalled character of religion. A rational regard to the government of God will be conducive to

our happineſs in every ſituation and circumſtance of life. Every other purſuit is becoming and uſeful only at particular ſeaſons, to perſons of a ſuitable age, and in a well choſen place. But the divine employments of piety invigorate our growing youth, and enliven our declining years; they brighten and adorn the ſplendour of proſperity; they are a refuge and conſolation amidſt the ſtorms of adverſity: they diffuſe a calm delight over the regular domeſtic ſcene; they aſſiſt and direct in the public engagements of general ſociety: they may be enjoyed on our beds in the ſilent watches of the night; and will travel with us in all our excurſions abroad: they are equally beneficial, whether we join the buſy throng of the populous city, or prefer the ſequeſtered retreats of ruſtic tranquillity. For wherever we go, God is preſent: whatever we experience, belongs to the general ſyſtem of his providence: in every part of our lives, from the dawn of infancy to the diminiſhing twilight of extreme old age, he is the ſun which enlightens, quickens and chears us. The

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lot of individuals and the revolutions of nations are alike ſubject to his controul. Whatever taketh place, *he cauſeth it to come for correction or for mercy; he afflicteth in order to cure; he ſendeth deliverance*, that he may elevate the heart to gratitude, and prompt the will to a more ready and chearful obedience.

In all the events of life, it is our intereſt, then, no leſs than our duty, to have reſpect to the divine direction, and to adore the diſpenſations of the Moſt High. For private and for public bleſſings, it is incumbent upon us to pay our tribute of thankſgiving unto God, and to temper the joy which is the natural and laudable expreſſion of proſperity, with the ſober and pleaſing affections of a devotional ſpirit.

The inhabitants of this nation are now called upon, by the termination of one of the largeſt eſtabliſhed diviſions of time, to commemorate an event in which our anceſtors were deeply intereſted, and of which we ſtill enjoy the invaluable bene-

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fits. A century hath elapſed ſince the Prince of Orange was placed upon the throne of theſe kingdoms, by the free voice of the repreſentatives of the people. The men, by whoſe patriotic exertions this important Revolution was accompliſhed, are no more; but they have left the privileges, which they ſecured to themſelves, as a ſacred bequeſt to their deſcendants. They were ſolicitous that their actions ſhould *be written for generations to come, and that people who were then to be created ſhould* have reaſon to *praiſe the Lord. Their* joy was increaſed by a ſudden and wonderful deliverance from evils which they actually felt, and from the dread of greater by which they were ſtrongly threatened. A diſtant generation muſt, of neceſſity, be ſomewhat leſs ſenſibly affected by the poſſeſſion of advantages which they have enjoyed without interruption, and of which they have ſeldom had reaſon to fear the loſs. On this account, it is uſeful to keep it in remembrance by periodical feſtivals, and after an interval of one hundred years, it is almoſt neceſſary to remind

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the old, as well as to inform the young, of the reaſons and effects of a Revolution which was ſtiled glorious at the time of its commencement, and which ſhould ſtill continue to be diſtinguiſhed by that exulting appellation, till every generous ſentiment is baniſhed from the breaſts of Britons. Here, then, the divine muſt concur with the politician; the preacher of Chriſtianity ſhould promote the views of the civil magiſtrate.

For the deareſt privileges, both civil and religious, with which we are now bleſt, we are indebted to the parliamentary ſettlement of the crown of theſe realms, firſt, upon the Prince of Orange, and then, on the failure of nearer Proteſtant heirs, upon the illuſtrious Houſe of Hanover.

In the preſent diſcourſe, I ſhall confine myſelf to the *civil liberties*, and ſhall devote a future one to the *purity of religion* and *the rights of conſcience*, which were preſerved, and ſecured to theſe nations at that memorable æra.

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Civil Liberty is, in every view, a valuable poſſeſſion. The natural feelings of the human heart revolt at the idea of ſlavery. If all mankind were wiſe and good, they would all have a right to act as they pleaſe; no one would be entitled, in any reſpect, to controul another; and all might purſue their own deſires, without detriment to any of their brethren. But as unhappily they are often inclined to ſeek their own gratification at the expence of their fellow men, and as many, were they ſuffered to proceed without reſtraint, would be guilty of outrageous violence, it is neceſſary that proviſion ſhould be made for the general peace and happineſs, by protecting the weak againſt the ſtrong, by diſarming thoſe who are inclined to miſchief, and by affording to the oppreſſed a ready and efficacious relief. Hence the reaſon and the origin of civil government. *The law*, ſaith the apoſtle Paul, *is not made for a righteous man, but for the licentious and diſobedient, for the ungodly and for ſinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manſlayers,*

*manſlayers, for whoremongers, for them that defile themſelves with mankind, for men ſtealers, for liars, for perjured perſons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to ſound doctrine* or good morals.

In proportion to the wiſdom with which laws are deviſed, and the fidelity with which they are executed, will be the ſtrength and proſperity of the public, the ſecurity and welfare of individuals. To determine the beſt means for the attainment of this end, is a Problem which hath employed the genius of mankind in every enlightened age of the world. And very different ſchemes have been formed for this purpoſe, according to the different views, and preconceived ſentiments of the ſpeculating politician. But there is reaſon to believe, that if the civil conſtitution of any, or of every, kingdom had been ſhaped after the beſt model that hath ever been imagined, it would have been found in the exerciſe to be ſubject to many inconveniencies, and to partake of the imperfection which is the common character of human

contrivances. In fact, all the governments that have hitherto exiſted, excepting only the Jewiſh, which had a divine origin, and the very recent one of the riſing ſtates of America, which yet remains to be tried, have been eſtabliſhed by men who were in a low ſtate of mental cultivation, have derived their diſtinguiſhing forms from accidental combinations of circumſtances, and have either been improved by the wiſdom and virtue, or been ſuffered to fall into ruin thro' the weakneſs and degeneracy of their members.

Of all poſſible adminiſtrations the uncontrouled ſway of a ſingle man would undeniably be the beſt, if a monarch could be found ſuperior to the follies, and unperverted by the vices, which are incident to mankind. The laws and government of the Deity are abſolutely perfect; becauſe he is poſſeſſed of every excellence; becauſe his almighty power is regulated by conſummate wiſdom; and becauſe his conſummate wiſdom is conducted by infinite benevolence. But man, as man, is

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ſubject to error, and is ſeduced by a variety of eager paſſions into hurtful exertions of his powers. And yet there is ſuch a promptitude and deciſion, with reſpect to both foreign connections and domeſtic diſcipline, in the ſole dominion of an individual, that it would in many, perhaps in moſt caſes be entitled to the preference, if a ſucceſſion of kings could be ſecured, who would never ſink below the medium level of human goodneſs. But the hiſtory of the world hath abundantly teſtified, that the number of the bad hath greatly exceeded that of the good; and if we conſider the peculiar temptations which muſt be preſented to a mind, that feels the poſſeſſion, and hath been educated in the proſpect, of ſo exalted a ſtation, we ſhall not be ſurprized that this is the caſe.

Upon the firſt view of the ſubject, it is natural to imagine that where the happineſs of all is concerned, all ſhould be conſulted, and take an active part. And upon this general idea ſome popular governments have been formed. But as many men will

always have many minds, theſe conſtitutions have borne the principles of diſſention in their original frame; they are practicable only in ſmall diſtricts; and as the bold and the cunning will unavoidably have the advantage of the timid and the thoughtleſs, they have generally been unfavourable to the actual freedom of the body of the people. And where they are the beſt adminiſtered in their internal form, they are naturally ſo tedious in their deliberations, and ſo ſlow in the execution of their plans, that they are unequal to a conteſt with an ambitious neighbouring monarch.

Nor, upon examination, will the rule of a few, who may be ſuppoſed the beſt qualified among their fellow citizens, be recommended to our regard by its ſuperior advantages. In a conſtitution of this kind, the vicious will often intrude themſelves into the higheſt offices, in defiance of the honeſt endeavours of the wiſe and good. And ſhould the wiſe and good be fortunately raiſed to their merited elevation, there is ſuch a faſcination in the poſſeſſion

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of ſuperior power, and there are ſo many inducements to abuſe it to their own emolument, that even the wiſe and good will be in danger of forgetting their original principles, and will ſometimes make ſhipwreck of their public virtue. In this caſe, the people at large will experience the tyranny of many, inſtead of a ſingle deſpot, and will be obliged to miniſter out of their daily labour to a greater number of expenſive vices.

As each of theſe forms of government hath advantages and imperfections which are in a great meaſure peculiar to itſelf, it was diſcovered, more than two thouſand years ago, by the penetrating ſpirit of a Grecian Sage, that the higheſt poſſible happineſs muſt neceſſarily ariſe from ſuch a combination of the three, as ſhould exclude their defects, and give the greateſt efficacy to their beneficial principles.

This ſublime ſpeculation hath in a very high degree been happily realized in the Britiſh Conſtitution. In the Houſe of Commons,

Commons, we have the repreſentatives of the people, without whoſe conſent no law can be enacted, and who alone are to determine what proportion of his property every member of the ſtate ſhall contribute towards the public expences, who are choſen only for a limited time, who muſt ſoon return to the general maſs from which they were raiſed, and muſt there remain with no excluſive privilege, if they be not re-elected to the ſame honourable truſt. In the perſon of the King, we have all the advantages of a monarchy that ariſe from ſecrecy, diſpatch and force in the executive adminiſtration of government. In th Houſe of Lords, we have an ariſtocrati aſſembly, who are the hereditary counſellors of the crown, who hold a middle rank between the prince and the people, who are to controul the tyranny of the one and the turbulence of the other, and are to afford to their country all the advantages, whatever they may be, which can ever ariſe from the legiſlative and judicial powers of a favoured few.

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By this beautiful, and in its eſſential parts, well harmonized combination of aſſiſting and counteracting forces, the kingdoms of Great-Britain and Ireland are diſtinguiſhed from the other nations of the world. Much learned labour hath been employed in tracing the origin of this admirable ſyſtem from the earlieſt times; and it is the proud boaſt of the conſtitutional antiquarian that Engliſhmen have been always free. His deciſions have been warmly controverted by the ſervile advocates for immoderate regal prerogative, and many inſtances have been produced in which our Engliſh Kings have profeſſedly acted from their own authority, and have eſtabliſhed their private will in oppoſition to exiſting laws. Theſe humbling facts have not been denied by the moſt ſtrenuous aſſerters of conſtitutional freedom, but are palliated, with no ſmall degree of evidence, as exceptions to the original, and always inherent, principles of the government, which aroſe from peculiar circumſtances, and were always redreſſed when the ſpirit of the conſtitution

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recovered its native vigour. But the ſubject is not worth a debate. The liberties which we now happily enjoy, are to be defended on the ground of their reaſonableneſs, and not of their antiquity. For however it may appear to the plodding ſlave of long prevailing forms, precedent is not reaſon; preſcription is no bar to the ſacred claims of univerſal juſtice; the longeſt exerciſe of uniform, unremitted tyranny will be lighter than nothing, when weighed in the balance againſt the happineſs of mankind.

It is, however, a fact which cannot be controverted, that the ſeeds of freedom were diſſeminated alike through the greater part of the preſent kingdoms of Europe, when they firſt ſprang into exiſtence upon the ruins of the Roman empire. The fierce and uncultivated warriours who attacked this vaſt, and once mighty, but then debilitated power, were all free. In the actual operations of the hoſtile field, they yielded to the unavoidable direction of a commander, who was choſen from his

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fellows for his ſkill and proweſs; but in the calm deliberations, whether of war or of peace, they had all a voice, and all laid claim to equal rights. When their governments aſſumed a regular form, they permitted their ſucceſsful martial leader to bear the honourable name, and to exerciſe the flattering authority, of King; but they inſtantly breathed defiance, whenever he tranſgreſſed the preſcribed bounds of his prerogative; and often taught him to his coſt, that they conquered not for him, but for themſelves. But while they were thus ardent in the defence of their own liberties, they had no feeling for the unhappy natives of the countries which had ſubmitted to their arms. The whole of the common people, and many of the former proprietors of the ſoil, were reduced to a ſtate of abſolute ſlavery, doomed to the ſevereſt and moſt degrading ſervices, diſtinguiſhed by the contemptuous appellation of villains, attached to the lands they were compelled to cultivate, and might be killed by their haughty lords at the expence of a trifling fine. While the

moſt numerous and moſt uſeful part of the inhabitants of Europe thus groaned under a wretched bondage, the kings and their nobles were nearly in a ſtate of perpetual hoſtility; ſometimes the one, and ſometimes the other prevailed; but whatever was the iſſue of their common madneſs, the blood of their dependants was profuſely ſpilt with no hope of advantage to themſelves.

In moſt caſes, the regal party at length prevailed. The increaſe of commerce, and the eſtabliſhment of chartered communities in the cities and larger towns, formed a firm barrier againſt the encroaching ſpirit of the nobles, and raiſed into conſequence the labouring part of the people. But the riſing ſtrength of the commons, though it was oppoſed with ſucceſs to the power of their immediate ſuperiors, was ſeldom able to counteract the ſtrength of the crown, when it was freed from its former checks. The kingdoms of Spain and of France have gradually degenerated into abſolute monarchies; it is long ſince

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the cortez of the one, and the ſtates of the other have been aſſembled, in which all the liberties of the ſubject reſided, but which were never more than the freedom of the few, involving the ſlavery of the many. It is more than two hundred years ſince the oppreſſed multitude in Denmark, revolting againſt the tyranny of the ariſtocratic body, made a free ſurrender of all their rights to their before limited king, and obliged their intimidated lords to concur with them in conferring upon him an undivided and uncontroulable authority. In our own time, we have ſeen the ſenate of Sweden overturned without oppoſition in a ſingle day. Poland alone ſtill retains the original ſtate of the modern European nations. Its king is a feeble governor inveſted with the enſigns, but ſcarcely truſted with the prerogatives of royalty; the nobles are jarring and lawleſs tyrants; the people are miſerable ſlaves. In the vaſt empire of Germany, the greater vaſſals, aſſiſted by the confuſions which are inſeparable from an elective government, have nearly reduced to a ſounding name the

power of the imperial crown, have in moſt reſpects acquired the rights of independent ſovereigns, and reign in their ſeveral ſtates with a deſpotic authority.

The iſlands of Great Britain and Ireland have had the peculiar happineſs to advance in general liberty, amidſt the fierce diſſentions of encroaching princes and jealous nobles. The lower houſe of Parliament, as a repreſentative of the general body of the people, was formed at an early period, and not only maintained its ground, but enlarged its importance, and increaſed its privileges in ſucceeding times. Its ſucceſs, however, hath not been conſtant, nor its progreſs uniform. The reformation occaſioned a vaſt acceſſion to the royal prerogative. The king, in conſequence of that event, became the head of the Engliſh Church, and claimed to himſelf the ſpiritual powers which had before been exerciſed by the Roman Pontiff. The ambitious temper of Henry the Eighth eagerly ſeized and carefully improved the favourable moment; and the wealth which

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he drew from the ſuppreſſed religious houſes abundantly furniſhed him with the means. His daughter Elizabeth inherited much of her father's ſpirit, and her ſubjects influenced by a reſpect for her abilities, and a regard to the critical ſtate of her government, were inclined to overlook, and to forgive, many irregular exertions of her power. Hence the moſt elegant but, by no means, the moſt conſtitutional of our hiſtorians hath aſſerted, that the princes of the houſe of Stuart did nothing more than claim prerogatives which their predeceſſors had exerciſed, and which had deſcended to them by the regular line of ſucceſſion. But the impartial and the candid, even of the friends of that unhappy houſe, begin to be ſenſible that they acted upon miſtaken views, and conſidered as parts of the eſtabliſhed ſyſtem, the occaſional deviations of particular conjunctures, which had never acquired a preſcriptive title, and to which no preſcriptive title, however early founded, could have given authority. In a fatal conteſt with the repreſentatives of the people, the

ſecond of that line, the infatuated Charles the Firſt, loſt his crown and his life. A ſeries of ill conducted politics, after ſome interval, produced the reſtoration of his ſon, without any ſtipulations in favour of the public freedom, and with no other advantage than the deluſive hope, that he would have learnt wiſdom from his own and his father's experience. But the ſecond Charles was little diſpoſed to relinquiſh his native principles, and was prevented from purſuing them to their full extent, only by the natural indolence of his temper, and the poverty to which he was frequently reduced, through his immoderate love of ſenſual pleaſure. His brother and ſucceſſor, the ſecond James, had the ſame, and if poſſible, a ſtronger inclination to deſpotic rule, with fewer natural incapacities, and more powerful inducements to puſh him on to deciſive meaſures. Dark and gloomy in the original diſpoſition of his mind, a bigot to a religion which at that time ſtood eminently forward as a profeſſed enemy to the deareſt rights of mankind, he had only one object

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in view, the eſtabliſhment of an undivided government in his own perſon, without the aid, and without the interference of parliament. The landing of the Prince of Orange, and the important events which rapidly followed, delivered the nation from the impending danger.

This invaluable deliverance we are now aſſembled to acknowledge in pious thankſgivings, and ſongs of praiſe. For the courſe of a century we have enjoyed the bleſſings of conſtitutional freedom. The patriotic worthies who met in diſguiſe at an obſcure hut, in an obſcure village, and who were joined in their noble plan by the general body of the nation, were deſirous not only to ſecure the liberties of their own age, but alſo to provide *for the generation to come, that people who were to be created might praiſe the Lord.* For tho' the means that were employed were human, the hand that aſſiſted and directed was divine. It was *the Lord* who *looked down from the height of his ſanctuary, and from the heaven beheld the earth; to hear*

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*the groaning of the priſoners, to looſe thoſe that were appointed unto death.*

While we celebrate the immortal memory of our great deliverer, and of his heroical auxiliaries, it behoves us, therefore, to direct our attention to the original author of every good and perfect gift. It is to the almighty governor of the univerſe that we are indebted in the firſt inſtance for the ſucceſs of their magnanimous enterpriſe, and for all the benefits which have reſulted from it. At the glorious revolution the eſſential principles of a free conſtitution were recognized and brought into action. The bill of rights ſoon ſucceeded, and by it the great charter of our liberty, which was extorted from the weak and miſguided John by his indignant Barons, was expreſsly confirmed, and the additions to it, which had been afterwards obtained from other princes, were directly aſſerted as the eſſential rights of the people. In conſequence of this happy eſtabliſhment, the legiſlative authority is fixed in the King, the Lords and the Commons; and without

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their joint concurrence, no regulation can obtain the force of a law. Hence the claim of the crown to a diſpenſing power is for ever aboliſhed, and the frequent meeting of parliament no longer depends upon the will of the ſovereign. A regular line of ſucceſſion to the crown is alſo determined, by a ſingle regard to the happineſs of the public, in oppoſition to every claim of prior hereditary right; and it is always to remain inviolably ſacred, unleſs, which every friend to his country will devoutly deprecate, ſuch a criſis ſhall again occur, as juſtified the expulſion of James, and the placing of William upon the throne. To every ſubject, the right of preſenting a dutiful petition to the throne for the redreſs of grievances, real or imagined, is fully ſecured. The loweſt individual is protected in the enjoyment of his life, his liberty, his reputation and property, in common with the richeſt and moſt elevated, and even with the ſovereign himſelf; and if accuſed of a crime, may demand, within a ſhort ſpace of time, a trial by his

equals in concurrence with the known laws of the land.

That our Conſtitution is perfect in all its forms, or that it is always adminiſtered in exact compliance with its preſcribed rules, it would be folly to aſſert, as it would be vain to hope. For what human invention hath ever attained to perfection? Where is the man, or the body of men, who have never fallen into error, and who have never done wrong? But we may juſtly boaſt, that, among all the nations of Europe, there is no one can vie with us in the ſecure poſſeſſion of the deareſt privileges that can ennoble and bleſs mankind. Our perſons and our actions are ſubject to no reſtraints, which are not either directly beneficial to ourſelves, or intended to promote the public proſperity. Amidſt the different ranks and ſituations which the nature of man produces, and the welfare of ſociety requires, there are certain ſacred rights which belong equally to all, and, in the exerciſe of which, all are equally defended. The

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ſovereign is not permitted to act, as if he were more than man; nor is the meaneſt of his ſubjects compelled to feel, as if he were leſs. The one is veſted with his office for the general good: the other owes allegiance in return for protection, and is bound to obey, becauſe ſuch obedience is moſt conducive to his own and his country's happineſs.

But it will be in vain that we have received this important gift from our generous anceſtors, unleſs, by a wiſe deportment, we prove ourſelves worthy of ſo diſtinguiſhed a favour. It is only by a becoming conduct, that we can obtain the actual poſſeſſion of liberty. He only is free, who maintains a regular and chearful ſubjection to ſalutary law, who violates no other's rights, and employs all his own faculties to the moſt beneficial purpoſes. Of what advantage will be the beſt defined civil privileges, if our own lives preſent a diſhonourable ſcene of wild diſorder and miſrule, if we bend under the tyranny of unreſtrained paſſions, if we drown our

reaſon in ruinous intemperance, and enfeeble our active powers by riotous exceſſes? The fooliſh and the unthinking miſtake licentiouſneſs for liberty, and deem it the birthright of an Engliſhman, to be idle, drunken and abuſive at pleaſure. But if this be freedom, who that is wiſe would not rather be in bondage? Theſe in reality are the worſt and the baſeſt of ſlaves. They are in ſubjection to luſts which fetter all the nobler faculties of their frame, and deſtroy their capacity for rational and permanent pleaſure. Political liberty never produces its juſt effect, when it is not ſubſervient to the more important liberty of the mind. Then, and then only, can we truly ſuſtain the honourable character of free-born Britons, when we are emancipated from the dominion of every improper affection; when *we ſubmit to every lawful ordinance of man for the Lord's ſake*; when *we render to all their dues, tribute to whom tribute is due, cuſtom to whom cuſtom, fear to whom fear, honour to whom honour; when we love the brotherhood, fear God, honour the King, obey magiſtrates,*

*magiſtrates, and are ready to every good work.* It is a debt which we owe to our patriotic countrymen, who were virtuouſly active for our welfare, as well as their own, in ſixteen hundred and eighty-eight, and who now are numbered with their fathers. Tho' dead, they yet ſpeak to us with the impreſſive eloquence of their never to be forgotten deeds. Cloſed as they are in their honourable tombs, their venerable forms this day preſent themſelves to our eyes, and conjure us to preſerve, and to improve the rights, for which they bravely riſqued their fortunes and their lives, and which they happily ſecured without the effuſion of human blood. They charge us to tranſmit what we have received from *them*, pure and entire to *our* deſcendants, and to fit them for it, by inſtilling into their minds a love of piety and virtue, a reverence for the laws, and a public ſpirited ambition of acting in every department of life with the exemplary uſefulneſs of good citizens. Yes, ye illuſtrious ſhades, we will be faithful to the depoſit which you have committed

mitted to our truſt; we liſten with awful reſpect to your ſacred commands; we will not diſturb your hallowed ſepulchres by our unrighteous lives. Reſt in peace, till the bliſsful reſurrection of the juſt: we will then hail you as our magnanimous fathers, and you ſhall not ſpurn us from you as degenerate children. We alſo will provide for the well being of *the generation to come, that the people who ſhall be created may praiſe the Lord, who* in your days *looked down from the height of his ſanctuary, to hear the groaning of the priſoner, and to looſe thoſe that were appointed to death.*

SERMON

# SERMON II.

GAL. v. 13.

*Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty.*

THE love of civil liberty is an early paſſion of the human mind. It requires no laboured train of reaſoning to demonſtrate, that the man who holds his life and his property, and is liable to be reſtrained in all his actions at the uncontroulable pleaſure of an arbitrary ſovereign, is a wretch who has loſt his native rights, and has little that can render his exiſtence a bleſſing. The members of political communities, therefore, were ſoon inſtigated by ſpontaneous feeling to arm themſelves, with ſteady courage, againſt the daring attacks of deſpotiſm. The patriot heroe fought; the patriot legiſlator devized the ſalutary checks of equal laws; the patriot magiſtrate

magiſtrate condemned to baniſhment or to death the enemy of his country's freedom.

But the idea of religious liberty is much leſs obvious and impreſſive. It is the offſpring of enlightened reaſon, and is founded on principles which are not unfolded, till extenſive views of the higher intereſts of man have been formed, and till great advances in mental improvement have been made. It was totally unknown to the moſt poliſhed nations of antiquity. Much, indeed, hath been ſaid upon the liberal and tolerating ſpirit of the pagan religion. But the ſubject hath either been miſunderſtood, through the influence of a preconceived averſion to chriſtianity; or hath been miſrepreſented, with the diſhoneſt deſign of throwing, by the force of contraſt, a darker ſhade upon the hiſtory of the church.

The equally real exiſtence of an indefinite number of gods, was the one eſſential principle of the heathen ſuperſtition. The votary of the Grecian Jupiter, had, therefore, no inclination to diſturb the adorer

adorer of the Ægyptian Oſiris, or the Syrian Aſtarte; for he believed them to be real divinities, though they were not honoured with ſacrifices in the eſtabliſhed rites of his own nation; and eſteemed it his duty to pay them ſincere acts of devotion, when he viſited the countries over which they were ſuppoſed to preſide. In this light there is reaſon to apprehend, that they underſtood the Jehovah of the Jews at their firſt acquaintance with that people. The philoſophic part of mankind, it is well known, were not blind to the abſurdities of the public ſyſtem, and in their learned retirement did not ſcruple to deny the exiſtence, and to ridicule the hiſtories of the gods. But as it was their eſtabliſhed maxim to think with the wiſe and to act with the vulgar, they bowed in the temple, and attended at the ſacrifice, with as much apparent ſolemnity as the moſt credulous devotee. Socrates alone openly aſſerted that there is only one God, and Socrates died by a judicial ſentence, as a contemner of the gods, and a corrupter of youth.

The intolerant ſpirit of their religion to all who publicly profeſſed a diſſent from it, is ſufficiently evident from the early hiſtory of Chriſtianity. For though the firſt perſecutions were entirely excited and conducted by the Jews, and were often reſtrained by the Roman magiſtrate, who felt no inducement to enter into the merits of a diſpute in which he ſuppoſed the Jewiſh nation alone were intereſted, he was by no means diſpoſed to permit his own religion to be called in queſtion. The violence that was offered to Paul at Epheſus was a popular tumult, raiſed by Demetrius and his brother craftſmen, and was, therefore, wiſely ſuppreſſed by the Town Clerk as an unlawful aſſembly: But this excellent officer at the ſame time that he diſcouraged the irregular conduct of his fellow idolaters, plainly declared that the preachers of Chriſtianity would be liable to puniſhment, were they found to be either robbers of temples or *blaſphemers* of the Goddeſs Diana. *If Demetrius and the craftſmen who are with him*, ſaid he, *have a matter againſt any man, the law is open,*

*and*

*and there are deputies, let them implead one another.* As the profeſſors of Chriſtianity encreaſed, and their principles became more generally known, they felt the full ſeverity of pagan intolerance. The number of martyrs in the primitive church hath perhaps been exaggerated by ſome of the writers of eccleſiaſtical hiſtory, but if we reduce them to the loweſt poſſible computation, there will remain more than enough to convince us, that the ruling powers paid no regard to the rights of conſcience. It is an idea, indeed, which they had never formed.

The Jewiſh diſpenſation, for reaſons which it would not be difficult to aſſign and explain, was ſtill leſs acquainted with the tolerance of a worſhip different from its own. The grand deſign of all its inſtitutions was to preſerve the knowledge of the one living and true God; and as far as its juriſdiction extended, all idolaters, and enticers to idolatry, were puniſhed with death.

But chriſtianity is, in every ſenſe of the word, a law of liberty. It not only delivered the Jews from the burdenſome rites of the Moſaic law, *a yoke which* the apoſtle aſſerts *neither they nor their fathers were able to bear*, but alſo applied, in all its doctrines, and in all its precepts, to the rational faculties of its converts, and laid upon them no injunction, which, by a juſt uſe of their own underſtanding, they might not clearly diſcern to be conducive to their happineſs. *He that hath ears to hear, let him hear; let him that heareth underſtand; ſearch the ſcriptures; if I do not the works of my father, believe me not*; was the addreſs of our divine maſter to his followers. *In underſtanding be men; give all diligence to add to virtue, knowledge; prove all things, hold faſt that which is good; let every man be fully perſuaded in his own mind; I ſpeak as to wiſe men, judge ye what I ſay*; was the uſual language of St. Paul to his fellow chriſtians.

From theſe injunctions it evidently follows that every man's honeſt judgment, founded

founded upon a careful and unprejudiced enquiry, is to be the guide of his faith and practice. But wherever there is a perſonal enquiry, there muſt, of neceſſity, be difference of opinion. That infinite wiſdom, which hath produced ſuch a beautiful variety in the viſible creation, hath ſo formed the human mind, as to render it impoſſible that all men ſhould think alike. To the revealed will of God, as far as it is underſtood, we are bound to yield an implicit obedience. But we are required to *try the ſpirits* of all who lay claim to a divine authority, and to refuſe them credit, unleſs they ſupport their pretenſions by deciſive proofs of a commiſſion from heaven. We are bound, then, not to believe, indeed it is not in our power to believe, till we are actually convinced. And in the interpretation of the doctrines of inſpired teachers, we are to employ our own reaſon, and to be determined by the deciſions of our own impartial judgment. The writings of the new teſtament are the records of the chriſtian faith. From them there is no appeal; and till another

another inſtructor ſhall ariſe, who performs ſuch miracles as were wrought by Chriſt and his apoſtles, they are to receive neither addition nor diminution. Theſe are open to every man's inſpection, and are addreſſed to every man's underſtanding; no one, therefore, has a right to interfere with the private deciſions of a brother's conſcience. For of theſe God alone can diſcover the ſincerity, the negligence, or the unfairneſs. *Who art thou that judgeſt another man's ſervant?* ſays the Apoſtle Paul, *to his own Maſter he ſtandeth or falleth.* Every chriſtian, then, in his religious character is on a perfect equality with the reſt of his fellow diſciples. He has his perſonal rights, his peculiar faith, his individual duties, for which he is accountable to no one, but the omniſcient ſearcher of hearts.

Nor do theſe claims of chriſtian liberty at all deſtroy, abridge, or impair, the uſeful, the indiſpenſible authority of the civil magiſtrate. His concern is with the public peace. Tho' he cannot judge of conſcience,

ſcience, he can pronounce with confidence upon the nature and effects of outward actions. Whatever injures the perſon, the property, or the reputation of a citizen, he is authorized and bound to puniſh. Here no claim of conſcience can bar his juriſdiction; for *he is the miniſter of God, a revenger to execute wrath* upon every one that infringes the juſt aud ſalutary laws of ſociety. But in every other caſe the rights of conſcience have their full force; and however the judgment may be miſtaken, if the perſuaſion be ſincere, it is entitled to impunity, to protection, to reſpect. For ſhould the conſequence be injurious, no one is hurt but the individual himſelf; and it is an evil which no human power can remedy. Compulſion can never make a real convert. The utmoſt that it can ever effect is to produce an hypocrite: and what is this but to render *the laſt ſtate of the man worſe than the firſt?*

Not one of the declarations of Chriſt, not one of the reaſonings of his apoſtles, can

can be fairly explained to juſtify, to excuſe, or to extenuate perſecution for religious opinions, or for acts that merely relate to religious worſhip. The firſt converts to chriſtianity had for the moſt part, as little of the inclination, as of the power, to diſturb each other in the profeſſion of their faith. They were a little flock. They were ſtrongly united in one common bond of union, by the difficulties and oppoſition which were attached to their new profeſſion. In the days of the apoſtles, likewiſe, they had not learnt to refine upon the chriſtian doctrines. They received the important principles of religion as rules of life, and as preparatives for a bliſsful immortality. As they were neither numerous nor rich, and were never more than connived at, often directly proſcibed by the ruling powers, the external forms of their religion, moreover, could not be other than few and ſimple. And their minds were too much occupied with the ſublime truths, which they had recently received on the authority of heaven, to be diſturbed by minute diſagreements with

reſpect

reſpect to the mode of expreſſing their devotion to the univerſal parent, whom they had been taught to *worſhip in ſpirit and in truth*.

But in a little time theſe favourable circumſtances ceaſed to operate. Chriſtianity, though its divine origin was fully eſtabliſhed by ſigns and wonders, and gifts of the holy ſpirit, did not continue to act in the way of miracle upon the hearts of men. It was to make its progreſs by the ordinary means of perſuaſion and argument. It was, therefore, liable to be obſtructed by the prejudices, and to be corrupted by the miſtakes of thoſe to whom it was propoſed. Its ſacred authority was gradually acknowledged by the Greek, as well as by the Jew; by the heathen Philoſopher and heathen Prieſt, as well as by the unenlightened body of the common people. And in theſe it by no means produced a total change. It elevated their thoughts to a nobler object of worſhip, and extended their views to a future ſtate of eternal life: but it did not exterminate all their former

opinions, or detach them from their favorite ſpeculative purſuits. It found their minds occupied by abſtruſe ſyſtems, curious enquiries, and nice metaphyſical diſtinctions. Theſe they ſoon blended with its doctrines, and formed into complex articles of faith. Had they confined their concluſions to themſelves, and received them only as the rules of their own judgment, little or no miſchief would have enſued. Deep and ſubtle inveſtigations, at the worſt, are, in themſelves, only unprofitable, are always innocent, and are often an healthful employment of the mental powers. But when they wiſhed to impoſe them upon others, and inſiſted that all their brethren ſhould adopt the ſame phraſes, and form the ſame ſentiments in every minute particular, they forgot the origin of their religion, and inſtead of promoting the mutual love which was intended to be the diſtinguiſhing characteriſtic of the diſciples of Chriſt, introduced diſcordant and jealous ſects, who ſometimes pitied, but more frequently hated each other, as impious enemies of the truth. Nor would there have been any

inconvenience,

inconvenience, if their zeal had confined itſelf to the uſe of argument, and never endeavoured to interpoſe with the tone of authority. Religious controverſy, if it ariſe from a ſincere deſire of improving in uſeful knowledge, is of admirable uſe to fix the attention, to ripen the underſtanding, and to ſtrengthen conviction; if it be conducted with candour and modeſty, is a beneficial exerciſe of ſome of the beſt affections of the heart. But when they preſumed to dictate, where they ought to have reaſoned; when they denied to others the right which they aſſerted for themſelves, and arrogantly acted as if they alone were ſecure from error, they produced the ſchiſms which they condemned, and proved that they had much to learn, before they could underſtand, in its full extent, the nature of *the liberty with which Chriſt came to make his followers free*. They knew enough to make them wiſe unto everlaſting ſalvation; but were far from having attained, and in the infancy of the Church, they could not be expected to attain, to the ſummit of chriſtian perfection. So

gradual is the progreſs of truth and goodneſs in the periods of general ſociety, as well as in the lives of individual men. They received the goſpel as the word of God, with the full conviction of their minds: but they had no conception of the rights of conſcience, except in its oppoſition to the pagan idolatries; they ſeemed not to be aware that human opinions muſt always be various; they miſtook an ignorant, an indolent, or a ſervile unity of profeſſion, for that humble, meek and forbearing *unity of ſpirit* which is the only enduring and ſatisfactory *bond of peace*.

As long as paganiſm continued the public religion of the Empire, they were reſtrained from acts of mutual violence, and could only vent their uncharitable diſpoſitions in angry cenſures, and warm, but feeble anathemas. But when the governing powers received the chriſtian faith, they were weak enough to take part in the controverſies of the times, and thereby encreaſed the diſturbances which it was their duty to reſtrain. Indeed it could

not

not be expected that political men, whoſe converſion was recent, and whoſe examination was probably ſlight, ſhould know enough of the ſpirit of the goſpel to reſpect the rights of conſcience, when its miniſters, who were bound by their profeſſion to devote their lives to the ſtudy of the New Teſtament, were ignorant of their authority. Chriſtianity, accordingly, was no ſooner eſtabliſhed, than the ancient religion was abſolutely proſcribed, its temples and images deſtroyed, and the practice of its rites forbidden under the penalty of death *(a)*. And the ſword of the magiſtrate was equally employed within and without the pale of the Church. Numerous are the edicts of Conſtantine and his ſucceſſors, which are yet preſerved in the body of the Roman law, againſt reputed heretics. In a reſcript to which the names of Theodoſius and Valentinian are prefixed *(b)*, twenty-eight different ſects are expreſsly mentioned, many of them under barbarous names, whoſe diſtinguiſhing tenets the modern writer of eccleſiaſtical hiſtory

*(a)* Juſtinian Code, Lib. 1. Tit. 11 § 1. *(b)* Juſt. Cod. Lib. 1. Tit. 5 § 5.

hiſtory is unable to determine, who are all forbidden the exerciſe of public worſhip, ſome made liable to capital puniſhment, and the reſt left to the ſeverity of the exiſting laws. And it would not be eaſy to determine more terrible penalties for the worſt of crimes, than are denounced in theſe and in others which were afterwards publiſhed. The ſuppoſed delinquents were, in ſome caſes, declared incapable of receiving the benefits of civil ſociety, or of ſucceeding to any inheritance *(c)*, and, in all, of bequeathing their eſtates to their heretical children, and of giving teſtimony in a court of juſtice againſt an orthodox chriſtian *(d)*; their places of worſhip, whether public edifices or private houſes, were forfeited to the eſtabliſhed Church, and thoſe who were convicted of attending them were ſubject to a heavy fine *(e)*: ſo far did this ſpiritual deſpotiſm extend, that, by a law of Marcian, all the profeſſors of Chriſtianity were forbidden publicly to call in queſtion or diſpute the truth of any article of religion which

*(c)* Juſt. Cod. Lib. 1. Tit. 1. § 4. *(d)* Tit. 5. § 11. 12. *(e)* Tit. 5. § 5.

which had received the ſanction of public authority: the offender, if a clergyman, was to be deprived of his office; if a ſoldier, to be caſhiered; if a freeman, to be baniſhed the capital, and to receive a moderate corporal puniſhment; if a ſlave, to be proſecuted with the utmoſt ſeverity *(f)*. But in vain did theſe ſevere edicts attempt to ſecure a permanent uniformity of opinion. The death of an Emperor ſometimes produced an inſtantaneous change in the nature of eſtabliſhed truth and falſhood: the late proſcribed heretic acquired a legal right to the privileges of the ſincere chriſtian; the former favoured believer ſunk at once, as by the power of magic, into an impious and oppreſſed ſectary. Yea ſometimes the characters of ſound faith and erroneous ſentiment were directly oppoſite in different places at the ſame time. One Emperor reverenced the deciſions of the Council of Nice; his colleague favoured the Arian doctrine; and each eſtabliſhed his own ſyſtem in his own diviſion of the Empire. A ſtreight, a river,

*(f)* Juſt. Cod. Tit. 1. § 3.

ver, a ridge of mountains, or an ideal geographical line, were the boundaries of pure and impure chriſtianity, and by a ſmall change of ſituation, without any change of inward belief or outward profeſſion, a man might be honoured as a ſound believer, or puniſhed as an heretical ſchiſmatic. Each contending ſect thus gained the pre-eminence, as it had the good fortune to obtain the ſuffrage of the reigning prince. The others were conſequently diſcouraged and oppreſſed, and as they were ſeldom diſpoſed to bear the oppreſſion with patience, violence was often oppoſed to violence, and the ſtrength of the empire, as well as the honour of religion, was wounded in the conteſt.

In the Eaſt, the chriſtian name was ſoon confined within narrow limits by the rapid ſucceſs of the Mahommedan impoſture; and if we conſider the corruptions by which it had been debaſed, and the evils to which its intolerant temper had given riſe, we ſhall be obliged to confeſs, that as far as pure religion was concerned, the change

change was little if at all, for the worſe. In the Weſt, the confuſions which ſucceeded the irruption of the northern nations, favoured the gradual advance of the papal eccleſiaſtical dominion to the higheſt and moſt ſhocking deſpotiſm. Excommunications, fines and impriſonments were employed by the Popes and their miniſters, to extort a profeſſion of abſurdities, againſt which the underſtanding revolted; and to bind in depreſſive chains, the nobleſt faculties of the human mind. At the beginning of the thirteenth century, this preſumptuous and unfeeling power was fully eſtabliſhed; the religious ſociety of the Dominicans was formed; the inquiſition aroſe in all its terrors; a decree was obtained in the fourth Lateran council that all heretics ſhould be delivered to the civil magiſtrate to be burned. In our own nation the Lollards or followers of Wickliff, who had diſcernment to diſcover the corruption of the Romiſh church, and who held many of the doctrines which have ſince been the diſtinguiſhing tenets of proteſtants, were expoſed to the fury

of unrelenting prieſts; their goods were confiſcated, and their bodies conſumed at the ſtake.

Under this execrable tyranny the benighted nations of Europe continued to groan for three hundred years. But at length the evil became too grievous to be endured, and finally produced its own remedy. The reſolute ſpirit of Luther, inſpired and warmed by the encreaſing rays of knowledge and truth, which then began to enlighten the world, was the firſt to engage in the glorious work, and many illuſtrious coadjutors laboured for its completion. It was too congenial with the generous minds of Engliſhmen to be received in our native land with coldneſs and indifference. It had already made a ſwift but unoſtentatious progreſs, when it met with unexpected ſupport from the accidental perſonal intereſts of the King. Upon the refuſal of the Pope to comply with his deſires, in a matter which the Roman Pontiff had long claimed as a part of his excluſive prerogative, Henry the

Eighth

Eighth diſclaimed his ſubjection to the papal ſee, aſſerted to himſelf the exerciſe of ſpiritual authority, and was declared by the regular forms of law to be the ſole and ſupreme head of the Engliſh church. But as he was the convert of paſſion and not of rational conviction, he only attached to his own perſon the ſame intolerant ſpirit and power, which had been the diſgrace of his prieſtly predeceſſors. The laws againſt hereſy ſtill retained their force, and were executed with undiminiſhed ſeverity. The Papiſt and the Proteſtant ſuffered in the ſame fire: the one for oppoſing the ſupremacy of the King; the other for denying ſome of the moſt corrupt doctrines of the popiſh creed.

The minds of the reformers in general, indeed, were too little enlightened to underſtand the nature of religious liberty. They proteſted againſt the perſecutions which they had endured, becauſe they believed themſelves in the right; but they could not be perſuaded that they were guilty of injuſtice in puniſhing thoſe whom

they thought to be perverſely in the wrong. Hence the ſevere and inflexible Calvin, in oppoſition to all the ſacred obligations of hoſpitality, condemned without remorſe the unhappy Servetus to the flames. The rapid and ſudden revolutions that took place in our own country after the reformation, have unhappily given us a diſtinguiſhed place in the hiſtory of proteſtant perſecution. Elizabeth had no ſooner ſucceded to the throne of her bigotted popiſh ſiſter, than ſhe began to exerciſe the ſeverities, from which ſhe herſelf had ſcarcely eſcaped, and to which many of her brethren had fallen victims. Infatuated by the chimerical idea of abſolute uniformity in the articles of religious belief, and the forms of external worſhip, the very idea which had been pleaded to juſtify the cruelties of the infernal inquiſition, ſhe inſtigated ſanguinary laws, and even violated the ſpirit of the conſtitution, to oppreſs a body of men who were acknowleged by their enemies to be ſound in their faith, and regular in their lives, but were diſſatisfied with the veſtments, the poſtures,

poſtures, and ſome of the other ceremonial rites preſcribed by public authority. The miſguided princes of the houſe of Stuart were actuated by the ſame views, and added to a ſimilar ſpirit of religious perſecution, a more daring infringement of the civil rights of Engliſhmen. The unhappy domeſtic wars, which terminated in the violent death of Charles the Firſt, were excited by the abhorrence of political, rather than of ſpiritual tyranny. Thoſe who had ſuffered under the latter, however, eagerly united with the opponents of the former, and in the iſſue were ſtrong enough to overthrow the epiſcopal church, and to eſtabliſh their own in its ſtead. But even they did not agree among themſelves, and were equally ſtrangers to the juſt principles of tolerance. The ſuperior genius of Cromwell, who is worthy of our attention, much more as a politician, than as a ſaint, was able to diſcover their force; and openly profeſſed that, in matters of religion, all men have a right to think and act for themſelves, and that, while they lived in peace with the reſt of mankind, they

were

were free to diſſent from the magiſtrate and the prieſt. But bold and deſpotic as he was, he could not controul the rage of bigotted ſects, who from a ſtate of pitiable oppreſſion, were haſtily ruſhing forward into the rank of ſavage oppreſſors. The Preſbyterian and the Independent, each in his turn, vented his malice, and exerciſed his power, againſt the fallen members of the late eſtabliſhed church; and were no leſs bitter againſt each other than againſt their common enemy.

Had the ambition, the courage, and the other talents of Cromwell deſcended to his eldeſt ſon, our unrivalled conſtitution would in all human probability have been for ever loſt; a ſingle perſon, under the name either of protector or of king, would have centered in himſelf the greateſt part of the powers which are now beneficially divided among the three eſtates; the epiſcopal form of church government would not have been reſumed; and from the prevailing temper of the times there is reaſon to believe, that religious tyranny would have been

been equally eſtabliſhed. Whether the Preſbyterian or the Independent had gained the maſtery, there would have been the ſame ſlaviſh reverence for human creeds, the ſame unfeeling exerciſe of ſpiritual authority.

In the reſtoration of Charles the Second, the Preſbyterians were no leſs active than the members of the Epiſcopal Church. The latter were by principle attached to royalty: the former were weary of the diſtractions which had long prevailed, and which ſeemed likely to encreaſe: both were anxious to recover the bleſſings of regular government. As they both conſpired to recall, they had both a claim of merit with the returning monarch. And it might have been hoped that they would have learnt wiſdom by their paſt experience, and, with a mutual charity, yielded to each others infirmities. But the minds of men were not yet ſufficiently expanded to feel the natural right, the political expedience, or the perſonal advantages of religious toleration. The perſecuting

abuſers

abuſers of ſuperior power ſoon became the perſecuted lamenters of reverted fortune. Far be it from the preacher of religion to wiſh that wounds which have long been cloſed, ſhould again be opened; or that *the children's teeth ſhould be ſet on edge by the ſour grapes, which their fathers have eaten.* They had better be conſigned to everlaſting oblivion, than excite one unfriendly ſentiment in the breaſt of a ſingle individual. I will not, therefore, expatiate on the ſevere laws and vindictive perſecutions by which the Engliſh Diſſenters were harraſſed under the reigns of the ſecond Charles and the ſecond James. I will readily acknowledge that they would have been more entitled to pity, had they made a milder and more chriſtian uſe of their power, when the Epiſcopal Church was in diſgrace. I have no wiſh but to produce a more lively idea of the happineſs we now enjoy, and to ſet in a ſtronger light the advantages we derive from the happy Revolution of ſixteen hundred and eighty-eight.

During

During the latter part of the reign of Charles and the whole of the reign of James, it was the ſettled policy of the court to diſcontinue the aſſembly of the repreſentatives of the people, to veſt the perſon of the King with abſolute authority, and to reſtore the ſpiritual dominion of the Pope. To promote this deſign, the paſſions and intereſts of the different proteſtant ſects were artfully played againſt each other, and it was hoped that each in ſucceſſion might, by ſkilful management, be employed as an inſtrument to effect the ruin of all. Hence the laws againſt the diſſenters from the eſtabliſhment were ſometimes ſuſpended by an unconſtitutional exerciſe of the royal prerogative, that the Roman catholic might enjoy the benefit of the general exemption. It was upon one of theſe occaſions in the year ſixteen hundred and ſeventy-two, that the edifice in which we are now aſſembled was erected. But as it was ſoon diſcovered that they could not be bribed to ſupport the deſpotic views of the crown, or to regard the corruptions of popery with leſs averſion than

was ſhewn by the members of the eſtabliſhed church, the edicts in their favour were revoked, and they were again left to the ſeverities of the law, that they might at leaſt be puniſhed for their obſtinacy, if they could not be terrified into compliance.

When the deſigns of James the Second became too notorious to be overlooked, and his advances to deſpotiſm too galling to be endured, all the diſtracted ſects of the proteſtant church united under a terrifying apprehenſion of a common deſtruction; the greater part of the diſſenters nobly refuſed to enjoy the benefit of a diſpenſing power which they knew to be illegal, and cordially joined with the epiſcopal eſtabliſhment in placing the Prince of Orange upon the throne. That auſpicious event was ſoon ſucceeded by the act of toleration, the charter of our religious freedom, the law by which we are protected in the rights of conſcience, have received a legal exiſtence, and are authorized to appear before the civil magiſtrate under the profeſſed character of

diſſenters

diſſenters. To adopt the language of a high legal authority, "the Toleration "act renders that which was illegal "before, now legal; the diſſenters "way of worſhip is permitted and "allowed by this act; it is not only ex-"empted from puniſhment, but rendered "innocent and lawful; it is eſtabliſhed; "it is put under the protection, and is "not merely under the connivance of the "law." *(a)*

The experience of an hundred years hath borne abundant teſtimony to the wiſdom and ſalutary influence of this memorable ſtatute. Some time, indeed, was neceſſary to ſoften the minds of men, and to counteract the force of long cheriſhed prejudices. Equitable as it was, it was not paſſed into a law without oppoſition; and in the latter part of the reign of Queen Ann, when a ſerious deſign appears to have



*(a)* See Lord Mansfield's ſpeech in the Houſe of Lords, in the cauſe of the city of London and the Diſſenters, annexed with his Lordſhip's approbation to the ſecond edition of Furneaux's letters to Judge Blackſtone.

been formed to fix the ſucceſſion on the abdicated family, which in its conſequences would have left our religion and liberties to the mercy of a popiſh prince, its operation was directly attacked and greatly limited. But it was reſtored to its original vigour by the propitious advancement of the houſe of Hanover to the throne of theſe kingdoms. And in the reign of our preſent ſovereign, an important addition hath been made to our religious freedom, by a liberal purſuit of its ſpirit, and accommodation of its proviſions, to the altered ſtate of the diſſenting ſects.

As diſſenters, then, we have the higheſt reaſon to be grateful to the diſpenſer of all good for the bleſſing of the glorious Revolution. Nor have our brethren of the eſtabliſhment leſs cauſe to rejoice in the happy event. Had the ſchemes of the bigotted James ſucceeded, the Church of England would have been involved in the general ruin, and the proteſtant intereſt throughout all Europe would have been expoſed to imminent danger. The States of Holland,

land, without the aſſiſtance, and with the probable oppoſition, of the Britiſh iſlands, would have ſtruggled in vain againſt the reſtleſs ambition of the fourteenth Louis of France; the reformed branches of the Germanic body would have loſt their counterpoize againſt the power of the Popiſh Imperial Crown, and the kingdoms of the North would have been the only remaining ſupport to the cauſe of religious truth and liberty. But while England and its dependencies remained in the ſcale, the balance was well preſerved; and the nations which ſtill acknowledge the authority of the Roman Pontiff, have themſelves been greatly benefited, tho' without the concurrence, and in oppoſition to the wiſhes of their prieſtly directors. The light which hath continued to ſhine with encreaſing luſtre upon the proteſtant ſtates, hath been reflected upon the people who ſat in the lands of ſpiritual darkneſs. The power of the Pope hath gradually declined, and is threatened with greater diminution: many of the greateſt errors of Popery are nearly exploded; its moſt pernicious religious

gious ſociety is aboliſhed; its unpolitical monaſtic inſtitutions in general are diſcouraged and contracted, the efficient power of the inquiſition is reduced to narrower limits; and a general ſpirit of toleration appears to be gaining ground, from which the moſt benign effects may juſtly be expected.

And who, my brethren, will not devoutly wiſh that all who are diſtinguiſhed by the Chriſtian name may imbibe the catholic temper of brotherly love, and while they differ in the outward forms of worſhip and the ſpeculative articles of faith, may poſſeſs that *unity of ſpirit which is the* only *bond of perfection?* Which of us does not rejoice in that liberal ſpirit which prevails in the town of Leeds, and which, I flatter myſelf, our late joyful commemoration of the happy Revolution, without diſtinction of religious party, will contribute to confirm? We have learnt by well tried experience that the offices of good neighbourhood and the feelings of friendſhip may mutually ſubſiſt between the

the members of different religious profeſſions. While men ſeparate themſelves from each other by gloomy bigotry, ſour diſdain, or fierce reſentment, they eaſily believe that thoſe with whom they refuſe to be connected are ſtrangers to every right principle and to every amiable diſpoſition. But when they are accuſtomed to meet in the free intercourſe of common life, to mingle in the chearful walks of ſocial recreation, and to enjoy in common the liberal warmth and the enlivening converſe of the hoſpitable hearth, they will ſoon feel that they all are men, and that while all are alike liable to infirmities and errors, all are alſo endowed with pleaſing qualities, and all have capacities for uſeful virtue.

And while the happineſs of individuals is encreaſed, the welfare of general ſociety cannot poſſibly be diminiſhed. Nothing is ſo fatal to the public peace as the rough colliſion of intolerant parties: nothing is ſo likely to enflame the mind to a fanatic enthuſiaſm

enthuſiaſm as violent perſecution; and when this enthuſiaſm is once rouſed to active exertion, it ſoon riſes to a ſavage fury, which the enthuſiaſt himſelf at the firſt outſet neither expected nor meant, and which the civil magiſtrate will ſcarcely be able to reſtrain. But when each is permitted to purſue the deciſions of his own conſcience without moleſtation; when the ruling powers are ſolicitous only to prevent every individual from offering actual injury to his fellow ſubjects, all will feel themſelves in a ſtate of eaſe and ſecurity, and none will be induced to attempt a change by acts of violence.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, as *we have been called unto liberty, let us not uſe our liberty as an occaſion to the fleſh, but by love ſerve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: Thou ſhalt love thy neighbour as thyſelf.* Thoſe who in paſt times were inclined *to bite and devour one another*, often found to their confuſion, that *they were conſumed one of another.*

*ther.* Let us, therefore, eſteem as a friend and a brother every honeſt and good man, by whatever religious denomination he may be diſtinguiſhed; whether he worſhip at the church or the meeting-houſe, the maſs-houſe or the ſynagogue; whether he uſe a preſcribed, or a diſcretional form of prayer; whether he prefer an epiſcopal, a preſbyterian, an independent, or any other form of church government. In the moſt corrupted religious communities, numbers are to be found who are ornaments to their own, and would be an honour to any profeſſion; the pureſt and the beſt are diſgraced by unworthy members. Then let us not judge of others by the narrow model of our own creed, but love all who love God, and deſire by a patient perſeverance in well doing, to obtain eternal life. As we are bleſt with the enjoyment of civil and religious liberty, let us manifeſt our gratitude to the protecting magiſtrate, by a regular and exemplary conduct, by an active diſcharge of our reſpective duties, and by an animated zeal for the public

good. Let us be at peace with each other and with all mankind, and *the God of love and peace will be with us.*

20 JU 66

THE END.